



WOUNDED WARRIOR

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Post 9/11 GI Bill changes

WASHINGTON -- Department of Veterans Affairs officials are reaching out to inform veterans of recent changes made by Congress to the Post 9/11 GI Bill that take effect in 2011.

"The Post 9/11 GI Bill is incredibly important because it reduces the financial burdens of higher education so that veterans have an opportunity to achieve their education goals," said Gen. Allison Hickey, undersecretary for benefits. "VA believes it is important for veterans to be aware of changes to the GI Bill this year and learn more about how these changes may affect them."

"It's hard to believe how far we have all come with the Post-9/11 GI Bill the past two years," she said. "Today, more than 537,000 students have received over \$11.5 billion in GI Bill benefits to help them take charge of their future."

Changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, effective Aug. 1, include paying the actual net cost of all public in-state tuition and fees rather than basing payments upon the highest in-state tuition and fee rates for every state,



Post 9/11 GI Bill changes are occurring.
(Courtesy photo)

capping private and foreign tuition at \$17,500 per academic year and ending payments during certain school breaks, to preserve veterans' entitlement for future academic semesters. Also, certain students attending private schools in select states can now continue to receive benefits at the same rate payable during the previous academic year.

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VA embracing social media tools

WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs has released a policy directive regarding the secure use of Web-based collaboration and social media tools. The policy allows the department and its employees to leverage emerging platforms that enhance communication, stakeholder outreach and information exchange to meet the needs of veterans of all generations.

"Veterans should have consistent and convenient access to reliable VA information real time using social media-whether on a smart phone or a computer," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "They also should be able to communicate directly with appropriate VA employees electronically."

The policy, "VA Directive 6515: Use of Web-Based Collaboration Technologies," encourages the adoption and use of social media by VA employees. It provides workplace boundaries and establishes the department's philosophy for communication:



Veterans Affairs and its employees are using technology to enhance communication, stakeholder outreach and information exchange to meet the needs of veterans of all generations. (Courtesy photo)

VA is open and transparent, and willing and able to engage and collaborate with its many stakeholders online.

"This isn't about using social media because it's cool or because it's a fad," said Brandon Friedman, VA director of online communications. "It's about getting the right information to the right veteran at the right time. This policy

sets us on a path toward changing how we talk — and listen — to vets."

VA began launching social media sites in 2009 and has more than 100 Facebook pages, more than 50 Twitter feeds, two blogs, a YouTube channel, and a Flickr page. VA's Facebook pages have a combined subscribership of more than 293,000 fans -- with the department's main page reaching over 138,000 people.

On Twitter, VA has a combined followership of more than 53,000 -- with the department's main feed reaching over 22,000 people. VA has posted more than 300 videos on YouTube and over 9,000 photos on Flickr, which have been viewed more than a combined 1.1 million times. Last November, VA launched its first blog, Vantage Point, which distinguishes itself from other government blogs by actively soliciting guest pieces from both employees and the public. By the end of the year, the department expects to have an active Facebook page and Twitter feed for all 152 VA medical centers.

President announces initiatives to help veteran workforce find jobs

by Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -- President Barack Obama has announced a series of administration initiatives to help military veterans find jobs.

During remarks at the Navy Yard here Aug. 5, the president proposed a set of tax credits for companies hiring veterans, announced a new task force to

develop reforms that will help service members transition to civilian jobs or higher education, and challenged industry to hire more veterans.

"Today's veterans are Americans who have done their duty," the commander in chief said. "They have fought our wars with valor, from the jungles of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq to the

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VA Social Media

- ◆ <http://www.blogs.va.gov/Vantage/>
- ◆ <http://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>
- ◆ <http://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs>
- ◆ <http://www.youtube.com/user/DeptVetAffairs>
- ◆ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/VeteransAffairs>

Retirement: DOD says no changes to current military system any time soon

by Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON -- The military retirement isn't going to change any time soon, Defense Department officials said.

"There's no immediate plan to affect retirement," Navy Adm. Mike Mullen recently told service members at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said any changes to military retirement should be studied carefully and should be "grandfathered" so the military doesn't break faith with those in the service.

Pentagon officials are reviewing all areas of the defense budget, and the goal of the review is to "inform the decisions and strategies that we have to make," Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said Aug. 4.

"So that's going to be key to what decisions we make and what areas we look to for savings," the secretary added.

In support of the department's efficiency initiatives, a small group of Defense Business Board members was tasked to develop alternative plans to the current military retirement system. The group briefed its findings and draft recommendations to the full board during their July 21 quarterly meeting. The full board approved the recommendations, and the group will issue a final report by the end of this month.

The Defense Business Board provides DOD's senior leaders independent advice and recommendations "on effective strategies for the implementation of best business practices on matters of interest to the Department of Defense," according to Pentagon officials.

Meanwhile, a Pentagon spokeswoman said, officials are reviewing the board's recommendations.

"Any recommendation to change the military retirement system must be approached with thoughtful analysis, to include considerations of impacts to recruiting and retention," Eileen Lainez said. "While the military retirement system, as with all other compensation, is a fair subject of review for effectiveness and efficiency, no changes to the current retirement system have been approved, and no changes will be made without careful consideration for both the current force and the future force."

Veterans Crisis Line available for Airmen, families, friends

The Veterans Crisis Line is a toll-free, confidential resource that connects veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Veterans Affairs responders.

Veterans and their loved ones can call 800-273-8255 and "Press 1" or chat online at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net to receive free, confidential support 24/7 -- even if the veteran is not registered or enrolled in VA health care.

The responders are specially trained and experienced in helping veterans of all ages and circumstances -- from veterans coping with mental health issues that were never addressed to recent veterans struggling with relationships or the transition back to civilian life.



Warriors welcome

Care manager Tonya McGough poses with Senior Airman Darren Lunsford, an Air Force wounded warrior, outside the Warrior and Family Operations Center at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas. The center staff invites wounded warriors visiting the area to drop by. (U.S. Air Force photo by Scott Hand)

Services and Resources

Air Force Wounded Warriors can receive expedited processing of disability claims from Social Security. Benefits available through Social Security are different than those from the Department of Veterans Affairs and require a separate application. The expedited process is used for military service members who become disabled while on active military service on or after Oct. 1, 2001, regardless of where the disability occurs. Visit the Social Security Administration's [website](#) for more information.

The [Trauma Survivors Network](#) is a community of patients and families who are looking to connect with one another and rebuild their lives after a serious injury. The American Trauma Society, a leading organization advocating for the injured and their families, in partnership with hospitals around the country, is committed to growing the TSN by providing the programs and resources patients and families tell us they need to manage their recovery and improve their lives. The underlying goal in all of these programs and resources is helping trauma patients and their families connect and rebuild their lives following a serious injury.



Anger is one of the main concerns of service members returning from deployment. Problems can range from irritability to rage. Most of the time things calm down by themselves, but if you are finding that some level of anger is interfering with your successful adjustment to work or with your relationships, then it is something you should pay attention to — [afterdeployment.org](#) can help. Take an assessment to get feedback on how you are doing or jump into the workshops to learn about how to manage anger. Check out the videos of others who are dealing with anger and explore the e-library for in-depth information.

VA launches Paralympic Program website

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs has launched its Paralympic Program website as part of VA's ongoing commitment to support the rehabilitation and recovery of disabled veterans through participation in adaptive sports.

The website is located at www.va.gov/adaptivesports.

One of the highlights of the new website is the "Success Stories" page featuring disabled veterans and their stories of how participating in adaptive sports has positively impacted their lives. Veterans who participate in adaptive sports at any level, as well as Paralympic competitors, are encouraged to submit their stories and share their challenges and triumphs with the entire veteran community.

The site also provides users with a comprehensive overview of the benefits of disabled veterans participating in adaptive sports, sports by disability, training allowances, the VA Paralympic Grant Program, and resources for caregivers and VA clinical



Retired Staff Sgt. Jeanne Goldy-Sanitate competes in the 2011 Warrior Games. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. J Paul Croxon)

personnel. Another resource is the "Sports Club Finder" feature, a searchable database developed by U.S. Paralympics that connects disabled veterans with local sports programs throughout the country.

For more information, click [here](#) or send email to vacoadaptiveSP@va.gov. (Courtesy of VA)

Upcoming events

Wounded Warrior Project offers [Project Odyssey](#). With its name derived from Homer's epic poem about overcoming adversity and finding the way home, Project Odyssey helps warriors heal their spirits and helps to overcome combat stress through outdoor, rehabilitative retreats that encourage a connection with nature, peers, and others. The retreats focus on the positive aspects of military service, teamwork, and overcoming difficult obstacles. Warriors participate in outdoor, recreational activities geared at building self-esteem and overcoming fears including separation from family, interaction with others, and trust issues. Activities may include horseback riding, canoeing, whitewater rafting, kayaking, rock climbing, rappelling, a high ropes course, fishing, skeet shooting, sled hockey, and skiing at retreats held in various

Calling all motorcycle enthusiasts! The Home Base Program will present its first "Ride for Our Heroes" on Sept. 24. The ride features starting points from locations in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont. The day will kick-off with a patriotic opening ceremony and acknowledgement of local military heroes at each starting point. The ride ends with a Rider Appreciation Party for bikers and families at Manchester Harley-Davidson in New Hampshire. There will be food, a band, celebrities, and activities for the children. To register or learn more, click [here](#) or email Paula Goldfarb at pgoldfarb@partners.org.

The [2011 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival](#) takes place in Fayetteville, Ark., Oct. 17 to 23. The key purpose of the art competition and festival is to recognize veterans for their creative accomplishments and to educate and demonstrate to communities throughout the country the therapeutic benefits of the arts. The 2011 phase of the local competition has ended; however, for information about entering the 2012 competition, contact the recreation/creative arts therapy staff at the Veterans Affairs facility in which you are enrolled. The 2012 event is scheduled for Oct. 8 to 14 in Boston. If you need assistance in identifying a VA staff person from your facility, contact Amy Kimbler at 320-255-6486; or Elizabeth Mackey, national director, at 320-255-6351.



Caregiver Retreats are available for wives, mothers, sisters, husbands, fathers, brothers, and other family members who are helping their wounded loved ones face a range of physical and mental challenges. These weekend-long, all-expense-paid retreats are hosted at numerous locations around the country, and offer a chance for new friendships to grow. Participants frequently share that the weekend provided them with the opportunity to create support bonds that continue long after the conclusion of the retreat itself. The Wounded Warrior Project staff follows up with all participants and assembles a comprehensive contact database to ensure everyone can stay connected. For more information, click [here](#).

Do you need to update your contact information?

NOTE - Updates should be provided to: AFW2 Program Office, AFPC Disabilities Branch, DEERS, DFAS, and the VA.

AFW2 Program Office – Call **800-581-9437** or via e-mail: wounded.warrior@us.af.mil

AFPC Disabilities Branch – Call **210-565-5653**, or e-mail disability@us.af.mil

DEERS – Updating info in DEERS is accomplished in one of three ways:
Call **800-538-9552**

Visit a military base ID card issuance facility

Visit the website at: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/address/indexAction.do>

DFAS – Online at "myPay" website: <https://mypay.dfas.mil>

VA – Call **800-827-1000** or visit their website at www.va.gov for the nearest VA office

